

VA**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

News Release

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Washington, D.C. -- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin have signed a sharing agreement that will enhance service to Native American veterans and will serve as a national model for additional partnering between the agency and Indian nation tribes.

The agreement, which was signed Oct. 30, 1998, will allow the Oneida Community Health Center, an Indian health-care facility, to provide primary health care to hundreds of veterans who are members of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. The VA is sponsoring the agreement to promote greater health-care access and services for veterans that are now underserved.

"The Department of Veterans Affairs takes seriously its commitment to care for those who served in our armed forces," said Willie Hensley, Director of the VA's Center for Minority Veterans. "Using this agreement as a model, we will expand health-care access to the thousands of Native Americans that have answered the call and served our nation with great distinction."

"The agreement brings medical care directly to Oneida veterans. The benefit is that our veterans no longer have to travel hours to receive basic medical treatment at VA medical facilities, sometimes hundreds of miles outside the tribe's reservation," said Gary Metoxen, Director of Oneida Department of Veterans Affairs.

The agreement sets up a fee-for-service program in which the tribe will directly bill the federal agency when it serves veterans. Although VA has entered similar agreements with other health-care providers, this is the first such agreement with an Indian nation.

The Center for Minority Veterans, a co-sponsor of the agreement, is exploring the feasibility of establishing partnership agreements and contract care initiatives with other Indian nations, health-care providers and federal agencies.